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ABSTRACT

Writing is a fundamental skill for students to develop. A learning environment should be in evidence which assists students to achieve more optimally in writing. Writing activities should be interesting, purposeful, meaningful, and provide for individual differences. Students need stimulating learning opportunities involving a variety of purposes or types of writing experiences. Diverse schools of thought in the teaching of writing include those which emphasize predetermined measurably stated objectives, decision making approaches, problem solving strategies, and subject centered approaches. (SR)

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Writing and the Language Arts

Marlow Ediger

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Writing and the Language Arts

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Writing, the second of the three R's- reading, writing, and arithmetic, is a fundamental skill for students to develop. Each person needs to communicate well in written communication. Being able to communicate well is fundamental to diverse types of written communication be it narrative, creative, or practical. Effective writing is salient in all curriculum areas, as well as in society. The ultimate goal in writing is to communicate subject matter effectively to others. To emphasize quality written communication, a learning environment needs to be in evidence which enhances optimal student achievement.

Interest in Writing

Certainly, developing and maintaining student interest in writing is significant. The writing teacher needs to select learning opportunities which encourage interest in written work. Selected activities need to be implemented to emphasize learner interest in writing. These include having students:

1. experience background information from stimulating slides, films, video- tapes, video- discs, transparencies, and filmstrips, among other audio- visual materials.
2. write diverse forms of poetry relating to the background information.
3. write friendly letters to classmates, friends, and relatives based on the audio- visual content.
4. write get well cards, announcements, and notes of sympathy.

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Understandings, skills, and attitudinal objectives need to receive appropriate emphasis when developing student interest in writing. With understandings objectives, students attain facts, concepts, and generalizations utilizing a multi- media approach in teaching- learning situations. Achieving understandings objectives assists students to have needed subject matter to participate in writing activities. As a second objective, skills are needed by the student to write well. These skills include comprehending ideas, applying knowledge to the act of writing, critical thinking, creative and critical thinking, appraising the quality of ones writing, as well as synthesizing content when writing for a variety of purposes.

Purpose in Writing

Each student needs teacher assistance to perceive purpose to participate in a writing activity. When perceiving purpose, a student accepts reasons for participating in the writing activity. The writing teacher may utilize a deductive approach in guiding students to perceive purpose in a given lesson. Thus clear, concise reasons are presented by the teacher as to why a given writing activity would be significant for students. An inductive procedure might also be utilized to guide learners to accept purpose or reasons for participating in a writing activity. Here, the writing teacher raises questions of students for the latter to respond with reasons for becoming fully involved in writing with a purpose. Thus, if students are to write friendly letters, the teacher must ask questions for students inductively wishing to participate in this writing activity. A third method in assisting students to perceive purpose in writing is to utilize extrinsic

motivation. With extrinsic rewards,the teacher must announce prior to teaching writing, minimal levels of acceptance that students need to reveal in the end product to receive a prize. Primary or secondary reinforcers may be used to reward students for quality end products of the writing activity. The purpose of the learner is to receive the award based on meeting quality standards in writing.

Meaningful Experiences in Writing

Each student needs to attach meaning to content written. If learners attach meaning to what is being written, they will understand the inherent content. Merely copying word for word from a reference source may well mean that a student does not understand the subject matter written. Students need to comprehend content read as well as written. Analyzing what is salient from that which lacks relevance is important in writing. After the learner has analyzed content, major ideas need to be related to be put in writing. Hopefully, each student will evaluate the worthwhileness of content written in the writing activity.

The writing teacher then has an important responsibility in having students write meaningful content. A second goal in assisting learners to write meaningful content is to guide students to relate what they are writing to their own personal lives. Too frequently when students disassociate themselves from content written, relevance to the person is lacking. Relevance of the learning activity in writing to the student is a must.

Providing for Individual Differences

The writing teacher needs to guide each student to achieve optimally. Slow, average, and fast achievers must accomplish as much as their individual talents and interests permit. Each person must be accepted as an individual possessing much worth.

Thus for example in writing a friendly letter to mail or exchange with a friend, students individually need different amounts of assistance in understanding and writing the heading, greeting, body, closing, and signature. Learners need to understand why these parts are necessary in a friendly letter. They need to view models as well as non- examples of quality friendly letters. Brainstorming, students with teacher guidance may be emphasized as to which content in the body of the friendly letter might be of interest to the reader. Ultimately, each pupil needs to decide upon ideas to place into the friendly letter. Hopefully, each learner will receive a reply to the friendly letter.

Students then will be at different levels of progress and achievement when writing a friendly letter. Each needs assistance, encouragement, and recognition to attain optimally in writing the friendly letter.

Stimulating Learning Opportunities in Writing

A rich learning environment is needed to motivate students to desire to write. Background information comes from reading, listening, discussing, observing, and viewing audio- visual materials. From the background information and stimulating methods of teaching, motivation for writing occurs. Stimulating methods of teaching involve problem

solving, inquiry, discovery learning, brainstorming, and reception learning.

Motivation to write may well involve diverse purposes. Purposes in poetry include the writing of couplets, triplets, quatrains, limericks, free verse, haiku, tanka, and diamantes. Purposes in prose emphasize students writing myths, fables, tall tales, fairy tales, legends, biographies, autobiographies, as well as other writings involving sequence and narration. Practical writing integrates school and society. What is emphasized in the writing curriculum has utilitarian values in society. Thus, the writing of business and friendly letters, letters of sympathy and get well, invitations to parties, announcements, and notices of events to come, represent the useful in terms of their utilization in the societal arena.

Philosophy of Writing Activities

Diverse schools of thought are in evidence to assist writing teachers in teaching students. The testing and measurement movements stress precise objectives for students to attain be written prior to instruction. The following represents these kinds of objectives in teaching writing:

1. The student will write a limerick. After instruction, the teacher observes and measures if a student can write a limerick. Among other items of appraisal, a limerick contains rhyme in lines one, two, and five, whereas lines three and four rhyme.
2. The student will write a business letter containing heading, inside address, greeting, body, closing, and signature.

After instruction, the teacher measures if each student has attained the desired ends. A student has or has not achieved the predetermined, specific objectives.

Predetermined objectives in the teaching of writing occur in state mandated objectives, in instructional management systems (IMS), and in mastery learning methodologies. The objectives need to be attained by all learners. Slow, average, and fast learners achieve these ends at different rates of speed.

A second school of thought in teaching writing emphasizes decision-making procedures. Thus, from diverse learning centers in a classroom the student selects which tasks in writing to complete sequentially. An adequate number of tasks are available so that the learner may omit those not deemed purposeful as well as interesting. Each learning center needs to have a task card which lists possibilities for students to pursue as learning opportunities.

As students choose tasks, writing activities are pursued to attain personal goals of the involved student. Common objectives for all to achieve in writing are not emphasized in decision- making methods of instruction. A psychological writing curriculum is involved when students individually sequence their own learning opportunities. Opposite of a psychological curriculum is one that emphasizes the teacher stressing predetermined sequential objectives for students to achieve in writing. A logical writing curriculum is then in evidence.

A third school of thought in teaching writing emphasizes problem solving. Subject matter knowledge, skills, and attitudes are acquired by students as the need arises to solve a problem. Thus, a thank you note becomes a goal in the writing curriculum when a student responds to

a gift or favor actually received. At this point, the teacher assists the student in writing a quality thank you note. Or, if a student is ill, the writing teacher guides students to write a get well letter. In writing the thank you note or the get well letter, the student as a writer communicates directly with the receiver of the message.

A fourth school of thought in teaching writing advocates a subject centered approach. Students are to learn content in writing and be able to utilize these learnings at a future time. A carefully selected textbook basically provides scope and sequence in writing. Intellectual development of students predominates in the writing curriculum. The mind needs stimulation to aid in mental development. Thus, academic content in writing provides major objectives in ongoing lessons and units. Acquiring worthwhile, vital subject matter also emphasizes the basics in writing. Common learnings or a core curriculum is emphasized here in writing. There are facts, concepts, skills, and generalizations that are essential for students to achieve in writing. Education is preparation for the future when as an adult the individual will utilize writing skills in society.

In Conclusion

The writer emphasized a learning environment which assists students to achieve more optimally in writing. Thus, writing activities should be interesting, purposeful, meaningful, and provide for individual differences. These criteria are a must to follow in assisting students to do well in writing.

Stimulating learning opportunities involving a variety of purposes or types of writing experiences need to be in the offing for students.

Sameness in methods and materials in the writing curriculum meeds to be avoided.

Diverse philosophical schools of thought are in evidence in the teaching of writing. These include the use of

1. predetermined measurably stated objectives. These objectives and their implementations tends to stultify students in learning to write. Creativity on the part of students needs encouragement whereby these learners have input into the writing curriculum.
2. Decision- making approaches are highly recommendable in the teaching of writing. Sequence resides within the learner in choosing sequential tasks. Sequence does not reside withing textbooks or a logically developed writing curriculum for students.
3. problem solving strategies. This is a highly recommendable approach in that writing skills are developed within a utilitarian situation.
4. subject centered approaches. A carefully selected textbook may be utilized as tasks for individual learners to pursue in a decision-making philosophy of instruction. Content in a basal textbook may also be utilized for student to use in the solving of problems. However, a textbook in and of itself should not provide scope and sequence in the writing curriculum. The student then needs to be involved in determining objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures as is in evidence in decision- making and problem solving philosophies in the teaching of writing.